

# Ready for their encore

*Leadership Lancaster's  
newest class helps retirees  
find their second act*

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FOR LNP | LANCASTERONLINE

Laurie Grove, 60, has started designing life after retirement with one main caveat: She wants to avoid the indecision, financial worries and depression a few friends and coworkers first experienced when they stopped working.

“They went, ‘Oh my gosh. I didn’t plan. I didn’t think about this,’ ” says the Lititz resident, who directs career services at Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology and plans to retire within the next two years.

Linda Cushman can relate. “Retiring was a very big adjustment to not working,” says the 70-year-old, who stepped down as a public health professor and associate dean at Columbia University in 2022. “I knew I was ready to stop working, but I didn’t really have a very clear picture of what my life would be like in retirement.”

Cushman moved to Lancaster with her husband three years ago to live near family.

“For me, retirement was an example of something that’s good that’s also hard,” Cushman says, explaining she felt ready to leave her 36-year career at Columbia but didn’t know what to do next.

Cushman, Grove and 20 others age 60 and above found direction through Leadership Lancaster’s Encore Academy, a brand-new program that educates participants about Lancaster County and life after working. The eight-week class links participants to opportunities that include volunteering, mentoring and serving as a director for a nonprofit board.

“Leadership is a lifelong journey, and you continue to evolve,” says Jennifer Diaz, Leadership Lancaster’s executive director.

## **‘It’s never too late’**

The nonprofit Leadership Lancaster already offers a flagship nine-month program for working adults ages 20-60, a college program and a separate leadership class for executives.

“There was this kind of gap,” Diaz says, explaining why this latest iteration focuses on adults over 60.

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# Encore: Leadership Lancaster launches new academy for retirees

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

Leadership Lancaster's new Encore Academy did more than educate its 22 participants about retirement and connect them to opportunities to mentor or volunteer. The eight-week program also fostered friendships. "There's a side benefit that I didn't anticipate," says Sue Washburn, 75. The former professional fundraiser didn't expect "developing a cadre of people around my age who are really active, really engaged, really involved as volunteers, and really educated and interesting."

Mary Beck, a retired social worker, enrolled in Encore to learn about ways to volunteer. She calls making friends unexpected and now gathers with participants for coffee and other activities.

Laurie Grove also has expanded her contact list. "It's been so incredible to meet individuals in all stages of retirement," says Grove, who plans to step down as director of career services at Thaddeus Stevens College within the next two years.

"There's individuals in this group that have retired fourteen years ago, and there's individuals who retired a month ago," the 60-year-old says. "It's wonderful to hear their stories."

The 22 students, who graduated in May, met mostly on Tuesdays from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. at various locations. The program included taking a bus tour of the county to get an overview, visiting the YWCA to learn about healthcare and social services, meeting at Drumore Estate for environment and sustainability lessons, and gathering at West Art to explore how to help artists. Other sessions covered finding identity and purpose in retirement and using personal stories to connect with others.

Most participants paid \$550 for the program, although some paid more to provide money for scholarships next year, says Jennifer Diaz, Leadership Lancaster's executive director.

Continued from 1 Sarah Kemble, Encore's program director, agrees. "People may be retired, but life's not over," she says. "There's so much more they have to give and they have to offer."

"This has been life-changing," says participant Mary Beck, a retired social worker who managed care for senior citizens. The 66-year-old says she sought direction after she sold Beck Care Managers, the Lancaster company she founded, in 2021 and then lost her husband about a year ago.

"I needed to figure out my role, my next step in life," she says. "And this (Encore Academy) opportunity came available. The connections, the education, the support, the opportunities — it's been absolutely amazing."

A session focusing on exploring identity and creating purpose impressed Beck. Participants reflected on transitioning to retirement, outlined personal values and evolving identity, and envisioned a purposeful and fulfilling next chapter.

After self-reflection, Encore participants listened to speakers from all over Lancaster County talk about healthcare, education, the arts and various nonprofits. Class members could decide where they could fit in.

"Lancaster County has way more than I think any of us realized — environment, arts, entertainment, culture, education," Beck says. "That's exactly what I was looking for, and it's exactly what I got. That class set me up to then look at all the other options."

The Lancaster resident will focus on two areas. First, she wants to join Friends of Reservoir Park — partly because she worked summers there as a Millersville University student from 1979-1982.

"I've always had a love for Reservoir Park," Beck says. "That's the connection that so far has felt the most meaningful to me."

"It's never too late for one individual to do something," says Meg Martin, who chairs Friends of Reservoir Park and spoke to Encore members in April. "We're actively looking to grow that membership."

Meals On Wheels of Lan-



Keith Williams, vice president of engagement and education with Lancaster Conservancy, center, leads a "Leave No Trace" walk through the woods for Encore Academy and Leadership Lancaster participants during one of three educational sessions in April at Drumore Estate in Pequea.



Left: Encore Academy participants Ellen Berford, left, and Ellen Harris, take notes during the "Leave No Trace" walk. Right: Laurie Grove looks at maps of a proposed environmental center and nature preserve on the Sunnyside Peninsula.



caster also caught Beck's attention. "I was impressed with the board director's vision," she says.

While Encore Academy is designed for those 60 and over, it does not restrict younger retirees, Diaz says.

Richard Booth, 57, moved from Boston to downtown Lancaster in January after working as a chief financial officer for several technology companies. At ease with retirement, Booth chose

Encore to learn more about Lancaster County.

Encore "provides a bird's-eye view that is otherwise very hard to get in an efficient way, especially if you're new to the community or thinking about how to connect," he says.

A class covering human and social services resonated, Booth says, because he received "the ability to quickly get an overview of folks that are passionate about and doing good work on problems related to the unsheltered among us, as well as overall housing affordability, food, domestic violence prevention, all of those sorts of things."

Booth created a finance committee for Lancaster Downtowners and volunteers at Anchor Lancaster and SCORE, which provides business mentors for people starting a business.

### A retirement plan

A session on connecting community members to county artists "lit a fire" under Grove, she says.

"We're trying to create programming — ways that we can support creative entrepreneurs," he said.

"I'm thinking about the students at Thaddeus Stevens College who not only don't have access but don't

even know they don't have access," Grove says of the school, which focuses on careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

"I've been discussing how we can introduce the arts to students at Thaddeus Stevens in a way that we've never done before."

Options may include providing information about performances, gallery shows and artist happenings or partnering with nonprofit groups to sponsor student tickets, Grove says.

She also considers encouraging students to create art.

"We have metalworking students, we have woodworking students, we have graphic designers," she says, also mentioning engineering and computer software students.

"I don't know what that's going to look like, but we're talking about how we can create a partnership with Thaddeus Stevens and the art community in Lancaster," Grove says. "We want to bring the arts to Thaddeus Stevens students in a way that makes it feel approachable."

### New opportunities

Another Encore participant will search for different opportunities that don't rely on her former career background in fundraising for higher education.

Sue Washburn already volunteers in Lancaster County. She served as trustee for Franklin & Marshall and now is a trustee emerita. She also volunteers for The At-

tollo Program, a nonprofit that focuses on leadership for high school students.

The 75-year-old wants more, though.

"I've been discussing how we can introduce the arts to students at Thaddeus Stevens in a way that we've never done before."

Participant Gerry Huesken, a former Leadership Lancaster board chairman, offers praise for Encore.

"They did a great job putting it together," the 71-year-old says.

Huesken, who retired as Conestoga Valley School District's superintendent in 2017, directed the Conestoga Education Foundation and then transitioned to consulting work. He's considering reducing those hours in favor of volunteer work.

"I think there are a number of different opportunities I want to look at more closely," the Lititz resident says. "A lot of it's intended for people new to the area. But I thought it was informative for people that have been in the area as long as I have to go through it."

That learning will continue.

Diaz and Kemble will meet with each Encore graduate over the summer to answer questions and offer guidance, Diaz says, noting a new Encore Academy is set for next spring.

Adds Kemble: "This has been a really wonderful experience for us."

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